

## Training and Developing International Bridge Players

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### 1. Context

The SBU has a strategic aim of “Support players, develop players, and select teams so that results in international competitions rank highly relative to comparable NBOs.” This workstream looked at how international standard players are typically developed and trained. This paper has been informed by three elements with the underpinning research available on the [BAMSA website](#)

- A [survey on junior and international training programmes](#) via the World Bridge Federation (WBF). 28 NBOs responded via different junior captains, trainers or NBO administrators.
- A [survey of 95 aspiring internationals](#) from many countries, including many who came through junior bridge.
- [Discussions between workstream members](#) and with external individuals with relevant experience. This includes reflecting on a range of [issues and risks](#).

NB This paper only covers the development of players of a sufficient competitive standard, it does not cover selection and captaincy procedures, these are covered by a separate workstream.

### 2. Key Findings – Prerequisites for developing high performing international players

Across the findings there is great variation around the globe but the common components of successful set-ups are presented below. A new approach will require flexibility, opportunities to feedback and review. We recommend these are the pre-requisites required for a thriving international pipeline:

**Junior Bridge** - given the time required to become an international standard player, starting young and having high quality development from an early stage is often of vital importance. The route in to junior bridge can be varied (e.g. schools, universities, family) but supporting players with an effective junior set-up and quality coaching is key. Funding this varies across NBOs, but successful junior programmes tend to benefit from support across the spectrum of funding sources in relation to educational authorities, government organisations, local governing bodies, Federations and private donors.

**Transition to full international level** - there is a large step from junior level to full international level. Players (junior or not) can be supported to make this step in a number of ways:

- Support from established players, either as partners, teammates, formal mentors or being approached for ad hoc advice

- An effective training routine, often with the support of a coach or mentor, and frequently taking advantage of online resources
- Playing in as many high level events as possible – particularly those that attract high level players from across the globe (including new online events that were created post COVID). NB This likely means playing in events abroad, outside of the current SBU calendar.

**Individual/Partnership Commitment** - to make the step to full international bridge requires a lot of time and commitment, with no guarantee of success. Many countries are seeing challenges with junior players facing competing factors – studies, work, family and other interests. One-off training events do not turn good players into great ones, instead it is through frequent and long-term development. The commitment to practice and self-discipline to maintain high standards is not something the NBO can instill, but will require personal commitment from players. In larger NBOs there are often more professional bridge players who have the time and dedication to improve, which is not a position Scotland is in currently. Players should also be encouraged to play in high level international events.

### **3. Survey of current and past Scottish international players**

The results of this survey are set out at <https://bridgemindsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Analysis-of-Questionnaire-to-Scottish-International-Players.pdf>

### **4. Board decisions**

1. A Director of Selection (DOS) be appointed responsible for the development of international players and selection of teams.
2. That a squad system be established which will form the form the basis of selection of teams for events from 1st September 2023. It is expected that squad selection and on-going development will start once a DOS is appointed.
3. Investment of time/money in the junior set-up to improve attraction (schools and universities) and development (coaching, mentoring, events support).
4. A budget would be made available over a 3/4-year period, to support the development of both junior and adult players. It is recognised that players selected for international competition may be asked to make a financial contribution (subject to an appropriate 'safety net') and that all international players should be asked to support other fund-raising activities.
5. SBU will develop opportunities to raise awareness and promote interest in international bridge. This will include online pro-am fundraisers, social media, celebrating success better, improved website promotion etc. This should be combined with working closely with BAMSA and an initiative to lobby government to secure recognition of the benefits of bridge, and possibly funding.
6. Building collaboration with other national bridge organisations (e.g., EBU junior squad leader) could lead to some shared training or practice events.
7. The Board agreed in principle, to support the approaches and specific policies recommended by IRG for an initial three years. The DOS will be required to report directly to the Board on a regular basis.